

go to:

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A Survey of the Documents and
History of the Bible
Part Three : The Witness of Early Church
Fathers to the Received Text

**XXV - HISTORY'S WITNESS TO THE SPREAD OF THE
GREEK RECEIVED TEXT AMID CORRUPTING INFLUENCE**

Quoting from Benjamin Wilkinson:

The Textus Receptus was the Bible of early Eastern Christianity. Later it was adopted as the official text of the Greek Catholic Church. There were local reasons which contributed to this result. But, probably, far greater reasons will be found in the fact that the Received Text had authority enough to become, either in itself or by its translation, the Bible of the great Syrian Church; of the Waldensian Church of northern Italy; of the Gallic Church in southern France and of the Celtic Church in Scotland and Ireland; as well as the official Bible of the Greek Catholic Church. All these churches, and at a time some earlier, some later, were in opposition to the Church of Rome, when the Received Text and these Bibles of the Constantine type were rivals. They, as represented in their descendants, are rivals to this day. The Church of Rome built on the Eusebio-Origen type of Bible; these others built on the Received Text. Therefore, because they themselves believed that the Received Text was the true apostolic Bible, and further, because the Church of Rome arrogated to itself the power to choose a Bible which bore the marks of systematic depravation, we have the testimony of these five churches to the authenticity and the apostolicity of the Received Text. The following quotation from Dr. Hort is to prove that the Received Text was the Greek New Testament of the East. Note that Dr. Hort always calls it the Constantinopolitan or Antiochian text:

- Page 96 -

**1. FUNDAMENTALLY, THERE ARE ONLY TWO STREAMS OF
BIBLES**

Anyone who is interested enough to read the vast volume of literature

on this subject, will agree that down through the centuries there were only two streams of manuscripts.

The first stream which carried the Received Text in Hebrew and Greek, began with the apostolic churches, and reappearing at intervals down the Christian Era among enlightened believers, was protected by the wisdom and scholarship of the pure church in her different phases: precious manuscripts were preserved by such in the church at Pella in Palestine where Christians fled when in 70 AD the Romans destroyed Jerusalem; by the Syrian Church of Antioch which produced eminent scholarship; by the Italic Church in northern Italy; and also at the same time by the Gallic Church in southern France and by the Celtic Church in Great Britain; by the pre-Waldensian, the Waldensian, and the churches of the Reformation.

This first stream appears, with very little change, in the Protestant Bibles of many languages, and in English, in that Bible known as the King James Version, the one which has been in use for three hundred years in the English-speaking world. These manuscripts have an agreement with them, by far the vast majority of copies of the original text. So vast is this majority that even the enemies of the Received Text admit that nineteen-twentieths of all Greek manuscripts are of this class.

The second stream is a small one of a very few manuscripts. These last manuscripts are represented:

(a) In Greek: The Vatican MS, or Codex B, in the library at Rome; and the Sinaitic, or Codex Aleph, its brother.

(b) In Latin: The Vulgate or Latin Bible of Jerome.

(c) In English: The Jesuit Bible of 1582, which later with vast changes is seen in the Douay, or Catholic Bible.

(d) In English again: In many modern Bibles which introduce practically all the Catholic readings of the Latin Vulgate which were rejected by the Protestants of the Reformation; among these, prominently, are the Revised Versions.

These two great families of Greek Bibles are well illustrated in the work of that outstanding scholar, Erasmus. Before he gave to the Reformation the New Testament in Greek, he divided all Greek manuscripts into two classes: those who agreed with the Received Text and those which agreed with the Vaticanus manuscript. (Nolan).

So the present controversy between the King James Bible in English and the modern versions is the same old contest fought out between the early church and rival sects; and later, between the Waldenses and the Papists from the fourth to the thirteenth centuries; and later still, between the Reformers and the Jesuits in the sixteenth century.

3. THE PRESERVATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT TEXT

A further step in the providential preservation of the New Testament was the printing of it in 1516 and the dissemination of it throughout the whole of Western Europe during the Protestant Reformation. In the first printing of the Greek New Testament we see God's preserving providence working hiddenly and, to the outward eye, accidentally. The editor, Erasmus, performed his task in great haste in order to meet the deadline set by the printer, Froben of Basle. Hence this first edition contained a number of errors of a minor sort, some of which persisted in later editions. But in all essentials the New Testament text first printed by Erasmus and later by Stephanus (1550) and Elzevir (1633) is in full agreement with the Traditional Text providentially preserved in the vast majority of the Greek New Testament manuscripts.

This printed text is commonly called the Textus Receptus (Received Text). It is the text which was used by the Protestant Reformers during the Reformation and by all Protestants everywhere for three hundred years thereafter. It was from this Textus Receptus that the King James Version and the other classic Protestant translations were made. In the Textus Receptus God provided a trustworthy printed New Testament text for the Protestant Reformers and for all believing Christians down to the present day. Thus the printing of it was, after all, no accident but the work of God's special providence.

With some 85% or more of the 5000 extant MSS falling into the category of the Received Text, there is in fact only one textual family the Received. All that remains is so contradictory, so confused, so mixed, that not by the furthest stretch of imagination can they be considered several families of MSS.

CORRUPTED TEXTS

When the warring sects had been consolidated under the iron hand of Constantine, this heretical potentate adopted the Bible which combined the contradictory versions into one, and so blended the various corruptions with the bulk of pure teachings as to give sanction to the great apostasy, now seated on the throne of power.

Beginning shortly after the death of the apostle John, four names stand out in prominence whose teachings contributed both to the victorious heresy and to the final issuing of manuscripts of a corrupt New Testament. These names are (1) Justin Martyr, (2) Tatian, (3) Clement of Alexandria, and (4) Origen. We shall speak first of Justin Martyr.

The year in which the apostle John died, 100 AD, is given as the date in when Justin Martyr was born. Justin, originally a pagan and of pagan parentage, afterward embraced Christianity and although he is said to have died at heathen hands for his religion, nevertheless, his teachings were of a heretical nature. Even as a Christian teacher, he continued to wear the robes of a pagan philosopher.

In the teachings of Justin Martyr, we begin to see how muddy the stream of pure Christian doctrine was running among the heretical sects fifty years after the death of the apostle John. It was in Tatian, Justin Martyr's pupil, that these regrettable doctrines were carried to alarming lengths, and by his hand committed to writing. After the death of Justin Martyr in Rome, Tatian returned to Palestine and embraced the Gnostic heresy. This same Tatian wrote a Harmony of the Gospels which was called the Diatessaron, meaning four in one. The Gospels were so notoriously Corrupted by his hand that in later years a bishop of Syria, because of the errors, was obliged to throw out of his churches no less than two hundred copies of this Diatessaron, since church members were mistaking it for the true Gospel.

We come now to Titian's pupil known as Clement of Alexandria, 200 AD. He went much farther than Titian in that he founded a School at Alexandria which instituted propaganda along these heretical lines. Clement expressly tells us that he would not hand down Christian teachings, pure and unmixed, but rather clouded with precepts of pagan philosophy. All the writings of the outstanding heretical teachers were possessed by Clement, and he freely quoted from their corrupted manuscripts as if they were the pure words of Scripture. His influence in the depravation of Christianity was tremendous. But his greatest contribution, undoubtedly, was the direction given to the studies and activities of Origen, his famous pupil.

When we come to Origen, we speak the name of him who did the most of all to, create and give direction to the forces of apostasy down through the centuries. It was he who mightily influenced Jerome, the editor of the Latin Bible known as the Vulgate. Eusebius worshipped at the altar of Origen's teachings. He claims to have collected eight hundred of Origen's letters, to have used Origen's six-column Bible, the Hexapla, in his Biblical labors. Assisted by Pamphilus, he restored and preserved Origen's library. Origen's corrupted manuscripts of the Scriptures were well arranged and balanced with subtlety. The last one hundred years have seen much of the so-called scholarship of European and English Christianity dominated by the subtle and powerful influence of Origen.

Origen had so surrendered himself to the furor of turning all Bible events into allegories that he, himself, says, "the Scriptures are of

little use to those who understand them as they are written." In order to estimate Origen rightly, we must remember that as a pupil of Clement, he learned the teachings of the Gnostic heresy and like his master, lightly esteemed the historical basis of the Bible. As Schaff says, "His predilection for Plato (the pagan philosopher) led him into many grand and facilitating, errors. He made himself aquatinted with the

- Page 99 -

various heresies and studied under the heathen Ammonius Saccas, founder of Neo-Platonism.

He taught that the soul existed from eternity before it inhabited the body, and that after death, it migrated to a higher or a lower form of life according to the deeds done in the body; and finally all would return to the state of pure intelligence, only to begin again the same cycles as before. He believed that the Devils would be saved, and that the stars and planets had souls, and were, like men, on trial to learn perfection. In fact, he turned the whole Law and Gospel into an allegory.

Such was the man who from his day to this has dominated the endeavors of destructive textual critics. One of the greatest results of his life was that his teachings became the foundation of that system of education called Scholasticism, which guided the colleges of Latin Europe for nearly one thousand years during the Dark Ages.

Origenism flooded the Catholic Church through Jerome, the father of Latin Christianity. "I love . . . the name of Origen," says the most distinguished theologian of the Roman Catholic Church since 1850. "I will not listen to the notion that so great a soul was lost." (Newman).

A final word from the learned Scrivener will indicate how early and how deep were the corruptions of the sacred manuscripts: "It is no less true to fact than paradoxical in sound, that the worst corruptions to which the New Testament has ever been subjected, originated within a hundred years after it was composed; that Irenaeus (AD 150) , and the African Fathers, and the whole Western, with a portion of the Syrian Church, used far inferior manuscripts to those employed by Stunica, or Erasmus, or Stephens thirteen centuries later, when moulding the Textus Receptus."

The basis was laid to oppose a mutilated Bible to the true one. How these corruptions found their way down the centuries and reappear in our revised and modern Bibles, the following pages will tell.

4. THE BIBLE ADOPTED BY CONSTANTINE

Millers Church History states, "The Epistle to the Church in Pergamos (Rev. 2:12-17) exactly describes, we believe, the state of things in

Constantine's time.

In Ephesus, we see the first point of departure, leaving their 'first love' -

In Ephesus, we see the first point of departure, leaving their 'first love' - the heart slipping away from Christ, and from the enjoyment of His love. In Smyrna, the Lord allowed the saints to be cast into the furnace, that the progress of declension might be stayed. They were persecuted by the heathen. By means of these trials Christianity revived; the gold was purified; the saints held fast the Name and the faith of Christ. Thus was Satan defeated; and the Lord so ruled that the Emperors, one after the other, in the most humiliating and mortifying circumstances, publicly confessed their defeat. But in Pergamos, the enemy changes his tactics. In place of persecution from without, there is seduction from within. Under Diocletian, Satan was the roaring lion; under Constantine he is the deceiving serpent. Pergamos is the scene of Satan's flattering power; he is within the Church."

On October 28, 312, Constantine defeated Maxentius, a rival claimant to the throne, near Rome. As they approached the battle, it is said that Constantine and his soldiers saw a glittering cross in the sky. Above it was the inscription BY THIS CONQUER. That night, it is claimed, Christ appeared to Constantine in a dream bearing in his hand the same cross and directing him to make a

- Page 100 -

banner after the same pattern.

According to Wilkinson (quoting from Hort and Swete in the earlier part of this paragraph), "Constantine found three types of manuscripts, or Bibles, vying for supremacy: the Textus Receptus, the Palestinian (Eusebio-Origen), and the Egyptian. Particularly was there earnest contention between the advocates of the Textus Receptus and those of the Eusebio-Origen text. The defenders of the TR were of the humbler class who earnestly sought to follow the Scriptures. The Eusebio-Origen text was the product of the intermingling of the pure Word of God and Greek philosophy in the mind of Origen. It might be called the adaptation of the Word of God to Gnosticism.

As Constantine embraced Christianity, it became necessary for him to choose which of these Bibles he would sanction. Quite naturally he preferred the one edited by Eusebius and written by Origen... The philosophy of Origen was well-suited to serve Constantine's religio-political theocracy.

Kenyon says, "The Emperor himself instructed Eusebius of Caesarea, the great historian of the early church to provide fifty copies of the Scriptures for the churches of Constantinople; and the other great

towns of the Empire must have required many more for their own wants."

More specifically Ira Price says, "Eusebius assisted by Pamphilus issued with its critical remarks the fifth column of Origen's Hexapla." This then was the source of the Emperor's Bible in the OT. Constantine and Sinaiticus are examples of this "Bible". (The precise connection is not known).

The Latin Vulgate, the Sinaiticus, the Constantines, the Hexapla, Jerome, Eusebius and Origen, are terms for ideas that are inseparable in the minds of those who know. The type of Bible selected by Constantine has held the dominating influence at all times in this history of the Catholic Church. This Bible was different from the Bible of the Waldenses, and, as a result of this difference, the Waldenses were the object of hatred and cruel persecution, as we shall now show. In studying this history, we shall see how it was possible for the pure manuscripts, not only to live, but actually to gain the ascendancy in the face of powerful opposition.

Attentive observers have repeatedly been astonished at the unusual phenomenon exhibited in the meteoric history of the Bible adopted by Constantine. Written in Greek, it was disseminated at a time when Bibles were scarce, owing to the unbridled fury of the pagan emperor, Diocletian. We should naturally think that it would therefore continue long. Such was not the case.

The echo of Diocletian's warfare against the Christians had hardly subsided, when Constantine assumed the imperial purple. Even as far as Great Britain, that far had the rage of Diocletian penetrated. One would naturally suppose that the Bible which had received the promotion of Constantine, especially when disseminated by that emperor who was the first to show favor to that religion of Jesus, would rapidly have spread everywhere in those days fallen imperial favor meant everything. The truth is, the opposite was the outcome.

- Page 101 -

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It flourished for a short space. The span of one generation sufficed to see it disappear from popular use as if it had been struck by some invisible and withering blast.

Through the providence of God the Textus Receptus was the Bible in use in the Greek Empire, in the countries of Syrian Christianity, in northern Italy, in southern France, and in the British Isles in the second century. This was a full century and more before the Vaticanus and the Sinaiticus saw the light of day. When the apostles of the Roman Catholic Church entered these countries in later centuries,

they found the people using the Textus Receptus (Wilkinson).

- Page 101

A survey of early versions – forever settled NT documents